

SEIZE the Day

SPECIAL YOUTH PULLOUT SECTION

The Future is Here!



Youth Performing Groups Conference 2001



By Jason Berg
Young Men's Music
Groups Leader

From July 19–July 22, youth from across the country came to the Florida Nature and Culture Center to participate in the 2001 Youth Performing Groups Conference, “Building a Bond of Trust Within — Mentor and Disciple.”

These talented young people challenged themselves to go to Florida despite the strenuous rehearsal schedules they were facing back home as they prepared for their family youth festivals. Challenging themselves to develop their faith and stretch themselves even more for the sake of the Mystic Law, the participants showed a tremendous amount of heart and an amazing seeking spirit. Each one brought something unique and helped make it the best performing groups conference yet!

This year's conference marked a new step forward for the SGI-USA Youth Performing Groups. In order to better support and cultivate the dance groups which youth are forming across the country, national dance leaders were appointed for the first time. Johnny Pastor and

Diana Campos will be taking responsibility as the young men's and young women's SGI-USA youth dance leaders. With this fresh departure, the members of the Youth Performing Groups were able to make a determination to continue advancing in the 21st century based on establishing the mentor-disciple relationship as their foundation.

Since this conference coincided with SGI President Ikeda's founding of the Fife and Drum Corps 45 years before on July 22, 1956, the youth took the opportunity to create a mission statement and send it to President Ikeda with their photo and the signatures of each participant. The pledge reads:

We, the members of the SGI-USA Youth Performing Groups dedicate ourselves to:

- Building a unified creative force strengthened by a nationwide network of friends.
- Being on the frontlines of society promoting mutual respect, continually seeking training, and encouraging individual growth.
- Changing the world by inspiring the

hearts of humanity through our performances and lives.

- Realizing our Buddha nature and helping others to do the same by propagating Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the 21st century.

Other highlights of the conference included a lecture on the mentor-disciple relationship and discussion with SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann and an interactive performance and leadership session created by the members of the Southern California Zone.

However, the best part for many of the youth involved was the opportunity to share their skills with each other at the talent show on Saturday night. The show featured amazing performances, including dance, taiko drums, singing and several music corps performances. The show was successful and the participants were so excited that their enthusiasm carried over into an impromptu jam session after the concert. Later, the youth gathered in one of the dormitory lounges and gave performances throughout the night.

For all who attended the conference and were able to experience the power and passion of these youth, it was abundantly clear—the future is here! ●

A New Direction for the Youth Performing Groups



Johnny Pastor
Young Men's Division
Dance Leader



Emi Gwin
Young Women's
Music Groups Leader



Jason Berg
Young Men's
Music Groups Leader



Will Mack
Music Groups Secretariat

Not Pictured:
Diana Campos, Young Women's Division Dance Leader

The youth of the SGI-USA should be provided with as many faith activities as possible. Many young people in our organization have a strong passion for dance. Dance groups like Era of Humanity in Chicago, Mystic Flava in San Francisco and Rhythm Nation in Los Angeles have been springing up all over the country. It is a trend that cannot be ignored.

In response to that passion and in order to fully support these groups, SGI-USA has formed a new national leadership that focuses on dance. Diana Campos and Johnny Pastor were recently appointed as the first SGI-USA young women's and young

men's dance groups leaders.

At the same time, Emi Gwin will continue in her position as the young women's music groups leader and Jason Berg will begin as the young men's music groups leader, a position formerly held by Andy Matsuda who has graduated from the music groups. Willie Mack is now the music groups secretariat.

The music and dance groups fall under the umbrella of the youth performing groups. While maintaining a spirit that will allow for a wide range of cultural expression, it should be kept in mind that each group is not only for performing, but also for training in faith.

Newly Appointed Youth District Leaders

In an ongoing effort to support the SGI-USA's goal to appoint young men's and young women's leaders in every district, *Seize the Day* will continue publishing the names of newly appointed district leaders and their districts.

As SGI President Ikeda states, "When you put all your energy into developing the rich potential of youth, both you and the organization are rejuvenated. I hope that you will find and raise people with great

potential, allowing them to steadily rise and fully engage themselves. If you create such a flow, the future will open up boundlessly before you" (*Faith Into Action*, p. 192).

Below is a partial list and we apologize if we have missed anyone. If we missed you or someone you know, please contact your region youth leader. Look for other new appointments in future issues of *Seize the Day*.

Southern Zone

Buckhead District	YWD	Jenny Shapiro
East Point District	YMD	Solomon Bailey
Norcross District	YMD	Kazumi Nomura
North Druid Hill District	YMD	Yukiyo Suga
Sandy Springs District	YMD	Koichi Tanabe
Sandy Springs District	YWD	Odessa Baker
Warner Robins District	YMD	Kevin Huggler

Southern California Zone

Balboa District	YMD	Tetsuya Matsushita
Clairemont District	YMD	Kouichi Fukuda
East Venice District	YWD	Sarah Marsh-Newman
Linda Vista District	YMD	Robert Allen
Vanguard District	YWD	Rika Hashimoto

Western Zone

3rd Ward Express District	YMD	Kibung Kim
Arlington District	YMD	Takahiro Kawasaki
Denton District	YMD	Hiro Takada
Denton District	Vice YMD	Bobby Fritz
Garland District	YMD	Robert Hope
Irving District	YMD	Masataka Kawanaka
Richardson District	YMD	Chris Nygaard
Vista Ridge District	YMD	Neil Mukherjee

Northeastern Zone

Academy District	YMD	Fred Brown
Bayside District	YWD	Wendy Koh
Bayside District	YMD	Balaji Jayarman
Bedford Stuyvesant District	YMD	Arthur Walker
Brooklyn Heights N. District	YWD	Andreia Breed
Brooklyn Heights S. District	YWD	Christina Sosa
Chelsea Piers District	YMD	Justin Durongsaeng
Chelsea Piers District	YWD	Teresa Meza
Co-op City District	YMD	Steven Vega
E. Flushing District	YWD	Naoko Leocadi
Fashion District	YWD	Kaye Kim
Lefferts Wingate District	YMD	Charles Delsarte
LIC District	YWD	Misato Fukatsu
New Era District	YWD	Yukiko Kobayashi
Red Hill Gardens District	YWD	Kathy Condon
Riverdale District	YMD	Masafumi Sakai
Riverdale District	YWD	Ritsuko Oshima
New Rego Park District	YWD	Sue-Jean Tu
Ocean Avenue District	YWD	Shoranda Alston
Steinway District	YMD	Ron Butler
Steinway District	YWD	Rika Tokairin
Umojo District	YWD	Sabina Ostolski
Umojo District	YMD	Darren Castello
Williamsburg District	YWD	Mariska Van Delffen
Windsor Terrace District	YMD	Toshi Someya

YOUTH *Study* SEPTEMBER 2001

The Shortcut to Happiness



By Alexis Trass, Santa Monica, Calif.

Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386)

Perhaps for you the word study conjures up images of late-night cramming before a test or endless hours of reading boring material about a subject you don’t care about. Coupled with all the other things to be done in a day, the idea of studying Buddhism might seem as appetizing as a bowl of Brussels sprouts. But just like those Brussels sprouts, study is good for you.

The definition of study, is to acquire knowledge and to understand. This means that study has two parts: taking knowledge in and knowing when to apply it. In the context of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, these two components are necessary if we want to positively change any situation.

Studying Buddhism changes our perspective, which can lead to practicing correctly, which leads to more benefits.

SGI President Ikeda is constantly encouraging us to study. In an essay, he wrote: “Leaders who are genuinely committed to realizing kosen-rufu will read the Goshō everyday, even if only a line or a paragraph, and make it a living part of themselves. I also hope that the youth division members, in particular, will study the Goshō thoroughly, as they strive to achieve their goals. I have found that those who don’t tend to be shallow and frivolous” (May 5, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

When we’re struggling with problems, we know that we should chant as much as we can and participate in SGI activities. But how many of us think: “This problem is driving me crazy. I think I’ll study and find out why?”

Let’s suppose we are in the midst of challenging any one of the many human difficulties that inevitably arise in our lives—perhaps a serious illness that doesn’t seem to be getting any better. We’re chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, but we need encouragement. We can pull out *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, flip to page 412 and there we will find this gem: “Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?”

Or let’s say we are having a hard time relating to someone in our lives such as a friend or boss. Even though we are practicing, things just don’t seem to be improving. We can take heart from the fact that, as long as we’re practicing, our circumstances are always moving in a positive direction. We simply have to continue chanting until we see a resolution to our problem. We should not give up, because as the Daishonin says in “Letter to Niike”: “Be diligent in developing your faith until the last moment of your life. Otherwise you will have regrets. For example, the journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?” (WND, 1027).

We could give examples ad infinitum of passages that get right to the point in encouraging us. The Daishonin’s writings contain treasures—everything we need to practice correctly and move forward. The point is that, without study, we’ll never find those treasures.

When first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was taken to

the Tokyo Detention House—where he eventually died—he asked his family to bring him a copy of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings. He requested one that he hadn’t already written in so that he could get a fresh perspective on the Daishonin’s writings. This clearly shows Makiguchi’s commitment to study, despite his harsh circumstances.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda always lamented that the majority of his fellow members abandoned their faith when Japan’s militarist government of World War II put pressure on them to show allegiance to the emperor. He attributed this to their lack of understanding of the Daishonin’s teachings. He remarked: “Without study, the members didn’t really understand faith. They became frightened and were defeated by persecution. It was very unfortunate” (Nov. 5, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 2). Had the members possessed a firm foundation of faith based on study, they would have understood that their persecution was undeniable proof of the correctness of the Daishonin’s teachings.

One of the wonderful aspects of Buddhist practice is that we do it for ourselves, and we do it for other people. We might chant with a suffering member and send passages of guidance to them. Ultimately, we can help them by offering encouragement based on faith. But how can we do that if our own understanding of Buddhism is weak? Of course we would advise that person to chant, but that’s not enough. Through the wisdom we tap into through study, we have the ability to set him on the right path.

We have to be able to give support based on a correct Buddhist perspective. And because of our efforts to help someone else become happy, it naturally follows that we become happy ourselves. We can see how study creates a wonderful cycle of joy in our lives.

Even if we don’t understand everything we read when we’re studying, we can still implant something in the depths of our lives. President Ikeda implores us to receive the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with our entire beings. He encourages us to study with the spirit: “Yes, that’s exactly right. This is the shortcut to happiness” (*Faith Into Action*, p. 167).

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Our youth publication is only as strong as what you bring us. Poems, Articles, Pictures, Stories, Commentaries, ...whatever you got, get it to us.

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Impressions from the Youth Performing Groups Conference



Traci Wilson San Francisco

Upon my return from the Florida Nature and Culture Center, I thought of words like action, sincerity, faith, dialogue and friendship, but the word that captured the essence of each moment was reflection.

I took a week to go over in my mind all of the wonderful sessions we had with youth from around the nation. Not only were the sessions well-facilitated, the energy that permeated from the participants was phenomenal. I was impressed with how most of the youth involved in the dialogues were sharing such personal

experiences without hesitation—just being pure and honest. I admired how each person shared from their hearts.

My experience at the FNCC this year was much deeper than I expected. I felt a larger sense of responsibility for all of the members, especially, the youth from San Francisco. I was proud to take action for the safety and well being of all the members. I discovered a new sense of appreciation for the youth I met for the first time and deepened the bonds of appreciation with youth I already knew.

In going to the FNCC, I thought the struggles I had were overwhelming, but hearing the amazing experiences and struggles that many of the teens were encountering and overcoming was inspirational. Everyone at this conference helped me see through my struggles and develop as a kind and sincere person.



*Dywana (L) with friend,
Lilia Williams (R)*

Dywana Denk Los Angeles

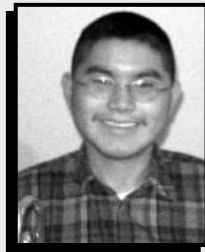
This year I will be graduating into the women's division. The Youth Performing Groups Conference at the FNCC was my last conference as a youth member. I started twirling the baton in the Fife and Drum Corps when I was 11, and then moved on to drill team. At 19, I joined drill dance (now called dance crew).

When the plane landed in Florida, my heart started pumping faster. I knew it would be a reunion with members who had attended other conferences with me.

We received amazing guidance and encouragement from SGI President Ikeda. He explained that as a performance group, we are ambassadors of the SGI. We shoulder the mission as vanguards of the SGI's cultural movement and, as such, we should strive to inspire hope and touch the hearts of everyone in the audience. To accomplish this, the performers must be full of hope and courage. The character of the performer transmits directly to the hearts of the people. This is why we must achieve a revolution in our life conditions based on faith.

Along with this incredible direction, I have made lasting bonds of deep friendships with people across the country. I have fantastic memories of the FNCC, from the bikes, to the food, to the content of the sessions, the talent shows and going to the beach. The feelings I have in my heart are there forever.

Thank you, President Ikeda, for creating a place where such amazing things happen!



Andrew Ijichi, New York

I had a great time at the Youth Performing Groups Conference. I am a trumpet player and this was my first time at the FNCC. It is a place where all youth can go to understand what it means to be a Buddhist. The people I met there were warm and I felt like we are all part of a family. I was encouraged by the youth because of their hope, courage and confidence. I could see it just by looking at them.

From now on, I'm determined to chant for others and I pray to be able to encourage them. I would like to share my life with all the world.

J.J. Chien, Columbus, Ohio

I was very moved by both the study materials at the conference, as well as the people who shared their lives with us. Many people had great hardships before arriving in Florida—some of them were life and death. To hear how they worked so hard to overcome them really encouraged me and made me determined to fight harder.

The performances at the talent show were truly amazing. I could feel the spirit that President Ikeda talks about in the "Precepts for Brass Band (Music Corps)," when he

writes: "It is my request that all of you, without uttering a word, will be able to move your listeners to deep emotion. Through your performances, I hope that you will move people to jubilation, and inspire them to attain their human revolution."

Because of this conference, I feel recharged and have gained some momentum to carry back and fuel our family youth festival. The things I learned at the conference really gave me the courage to face daily obstacles, and I am determined to bring back the FNCC spirit, take our festival's performances to the next level and share the same spirit President Ikeda talks about with the audience.